

Minutes of Public Works Committee Tuesday, October 6, 2009

Present: Steve Braun (Chair), Mike Cann, Rob Crowner, Guilford Mooring (Superintendent, DPW), Don George, Charlie Moran, Vincent O'Connor, Aaron Hayden (Select Board).

1. Administrative

Minutes of September 1, 2009 accepted (5-0-0).

Next meeting set for: Tuesday, November 10, 2009, 7:00.

2. Old Business

Updates:

Lincoln-Sunset Partial Closing Experiment. Superintendent Guilford Mooring reported on the experimental partial closing of Lincoln and Sunset avenues. The traffic counters will come up Thursday 10/8, and the data analysis by a UMass professor and his graduate students will begin. The UMass team put counters in several places—e.g. in front of Home Depot, East Pleasant, Sunset and Fearing. We'll get a lot of data. We'll get the raw data and an analysis in two weeks. There is a DPW meeting scheduled this Thursday on the closing with police and fire. Lots of negative comments via email from commuters to UMass inconvenienced by the diversion. Written comments from UMass administration indicate that the University administration sees few issues with the closing. During the experiment there were traffic backups on Mass Ave. and University Drive, but not more than usual.

The next step: DPW will take all the 200 email inputs and categorize them, screening out duplicates. One way of reading the emails and correspondence: everything is true, and both Lincoln Avenue residents and UMass teachers are whiners; therefore we should walk away from situation. But that's too easy. If you read through the emails, there are interesting comments and useful information. For instance, drivers who use the 116 bypass to get to UMass get stuck on the exit ramp, trying to merge with eastbound traffic coming over the bridge on North Hadley from North Maple Street. And the intersection of Mass. Avenue and University Drive is another choke point, with its blinking lights. Further, we didn't know that so many UMass commuters from Belchertown and southeast Amherst went across town on Route 9 to Lincoln. Charlie Moran noted that Steve Maroulis, Chair of the Amherst chamber of Commerce, saw that increased traffic through town would not be good for local business. Guilford Mooring said that DPW crews were downtown all that time, and saw no problem.

After the data are collected and analyzed, DPW will summarize them and submit a report to the Town Manager and Select Board. Bottom line: We can't put barriers where we did on Lincoln and Fearing, because they cut off a group of people who live north of the barriers. But the blockage seems to have worked, in terms of reducing traffic on Lincoln and Sunset Avenues.

The question becomes “How to do it better?” Before we move again to partial closing, we need to improve alternate routes, specifically the intersections of North Hadley Road and 116 and University Drive, including the intersections at Big Y, Amity Street, and Mass. Avenue. Discussed possibility of rotary. Light at Amity; UDrive needs fixing before full Lincoln blockage. To get this done we are looking out 3-5 years. Vince O’Connor suggested that after all these improvements to University Drive and North Hadley/116, we should again evaluate traffic flow to see if the partial closings of Lincoln and Sunset are still necessary.

Moved: that PWC ask the chair to ask the Town Manager for the data analysis/report when the report is available.

Approved: 5-1-0

New business

Funding for Atkins, 116. Guilford Mooring reported good news: that the State has granted the Town significant “R” money: 2.5M for repaving Route 116, Snell Street to Atkins Corner; and 2.5M for the Atkins Corner project, extending from Hampshire College to Country Way. Roadway will be milled 1.5 inches, with a new 2-inch layer added back. No sidewalks—just minor drainage, crosswalks, and ramps. It is too expensive to have sidewalks folded into a state project, given state pricing schedules.

Proposed New Process for Infrastructure Project Review. Mr. Mooring observed that the review process for new infrastructure projects is vague and choppy, making it difficult to track multiple projects. Sometimes committees give responses, sometimes not. He will propose that the Town adopt a process that piggybacks on the Mass Highway process. At the 25% design stage, PWC will arrange a public hearing. Prior to the hearing, DPW sends out plans to any and all committees and announces the hearing. A deadline is established for comments, and all comments from all committees come in at the same time. DPW takes these comments into consideration, moves to the 75% design stage, and again PWC convenes a public hearing, calling for comments by a deadline. DPW takes the comments from this hearing, makes design changes as appropriate, and moves to the 100% design stage.

All of this will be posted on the DPW web site: projects, progress, and hearing schedules. Individual and Committee comments will be posted on the site as well.

The sense of the meeting: that PWC supports the proposed infrastructure project process review, as described, and will be ready and willing to take its part in it.

Old Business:

Sidewalk plowing. Guilford Mooring showed us what is now being done. At present, we’re plowing sidewalks that are contiguous with, or lead to, town-owned properties. Effectively, the town is plowing most sidewalks on through streets—not all, but most, and the most major. Sidewalks that lead to schools are plowed: e.g. Taylor, Gray, Cottage, Triangle, Main, Pelham Road, and sidewalks leading to Marks Meadow, Crocker Farm. Further, the Town plows

sidewalks along almost all the major roads: e.g. West Street, East Hadley Road, Belchertown Road, Northampton Road, North Pleasant Street, Pine Street, East Pleasant Street.

To do the whole town, or to increase sidewalk plowing by a significant fraction, DPW would need more equipment—two more sidewalk plows. This would be a capital item: \$100K . DPW would have to pull two workers from somewhere, and given present reduced staffing, the personnel would have to be taken from road plowing and assigned to sidewalk plowing. So that's the trade-off: more sidewalk plowing and less road plowing.

Don George noted that there's a Town ordinance that property owners must plow their sidewalks. Perhaps this could be enforced?

Downtown sidewalks are all shovel-jobs. If DPW were to undertake downtown sidewalks, this would take two people—again from road plowing.

Northampton's policy is to plow only sidewalks abutting city property.

Steve Braun asked why we plow the sidewalks on Lincoln and Sunset. Charlie Moran suggests: foot traffic to 'school'—UMass.

Amherst College plows quite a lot of sidewalks—e.g. Spring Street.

Guilford Mooring will come back to the Committee with a further proposal, with estimated costs in equipment and time/personnel.

Rob Crowner asked if there might be savings with IceBGone that we could apply to sidewalk plowing. This raised the issue of materials to be used for de-icing Town streets.

Guilford Mooring wants to move away from sand. So there would be an initial new cost. Possible savings later: less time plowing, less time picking up sand.

Full discussion of this issue was deferred to next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:46.

Respectfully Submitted,

Charlie Moran, Sec'y pro tem.